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## **Organizational Culture in the Context of National Culture**

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An organization's culture can have a profound impact on how its employees with caregiving responsibilities experience their work and family roles (Shockley, in press; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999). At the same time, national culture also influences individuals' preferences for how they manage those roles. For instance, workaholism among men is more common in cultures centered on achievement and material success than in cultures that emphasize quality of life; women are less likely to work outside the home in cultures featuring a strong breadwinner/homemaker gender role ideology (Lewis, 2009; Snir & Harpaz, 2009). Given that globalization has increased international mobility for workers as well as the likelihood that home country workers are interacting with colleagues from or in other countries (Tams & Arthur, 2007), it has become paramount for work-family scholarship to recognize that multiple layers of culture are increasingly influencing employees' experiences in integrating work and family, as well as their perceptions of appropriate organizational work-family practices. It is important for work-family scholars to determine the efficacy of organizational work-family practices and policies, as these practices continue to expand beyond their Western points of origin and become implemented all over the world (e.g., Allen, 2013; Ollier-Malaterre, Valcour, Den Dulk & Kossek, 2013).

In this chapter, we first outline the importance of organizational culture from a work-family perspective by reviewing extant research on how an employer's work-family culture influences individual outcomes such as employees' job-related attitudes, contextual performance, experience of work-family conflict, and utilization of work-family benefits. Next, we examine the role of national culture in shaping work-family perceptions via culture frameworks and work-family role preferences. We go on to discuss the relationship between national culture and organizational work-family culture, before discussing the consequences of cultural alignment or misalignment – the match or mismatch between an employee's work-family role preferences and the role demands of an organization set forth by their work-family culture and policies. We posit that when there is no shared national culture framework influencing both individual preferences and organizational role demands, the propensity for mismatch will be higher. Finally, we present a new model of global work-family culture and briefly introduce its implications for theory and practice.

### **The importance of organizational culture from a work-family perspective**

Organizational culture can be broadly defined as a shared set of assumptions, values, and beliefs (Schein, 2010). These are implicit notions, which are expressed and communicated partly in symbolic form; they are taught to organizational newcomers as the correct way to think and feel, via stories and myths about the organization's history (Alvesson, 2013; Schein, 2010). Employees use the information inferred during this process of socialization to guide their behavior; they also observe the behavior of other organizational members, particularly leaders, to gauge which actions are likely to be useful and promote success (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). In this way, organizational culture serves as a means of signaling to employees how they are expected to manage their work and family roles. For example, do leaders endorse the value of

non-work interests and activities and role-model behaviors such as leaving the workplace before dinnertime? Or do promotions and status come only to those who enact the role of the “ideal worker” by visibly working long hours and prioritizing job-related tasks over family time?

Assumptions, beliefs and values among organizational members regarding the extent to which the organization exhibits support for its employees’ efforts to balance work and family responsibilities is referred to as work-family culture (Thompson et al., 1999). Work-family culture can be viewed as a type of organizational support, and is generally held to incorporate such factors as supervisory support (both instrumental and emotional), organizational time demands on employees, and perceived career consequences of using work-family benefits or flexible work practices (Jahn, Thompson, & Kopelman, 2003; Thompson et al., 1999).

Organizational cultures supportive of work-family issues have been shown to impact a number of employee outcomes – perceptions of work-family support have been linked to greater life satisfaction, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and decreased turnover intentions and absenteeism (see Andreassi & Thompson, 2008, and Shockley, Thompson, & Andreassi, 2013 for a review). In addition, perceptions of a supportive work-family culture have been related to lower levels of work stress and general psychological strain (Beauregard, 2011a; Thompson & Prottas, 2006).

Organizational cultures that demonstrate support for employees’ efforts to manage work and family responsibilities are also associated with employee outcomes directly related to the combination of work and family roles. This support has been shown to reduce time- and strain-based conflict between domains, and increase positive spillover of emotions, knowledge, and skills. Individuals who perceive a supportive work-family culture within their organizations report lower levels of both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict, and those whose

supervisors exhibit family-supportive behaviors report higher levels of both work-to-family enrichment and family-to-work enrichment (Beauregard, 2011a; Greenhaus, Ziegert, & Allen, 2012; Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Greene-Shortridge, 2012; Shockley et al., 2013).

Work-family culture also directly influences employees' choices regarding how to manage their work and family roles, by operating as either an incentive or an impediment to the utilization of work-family or flexible working initiatives. The extent to which employees perceive that the culture of their organization encourages or discourages the use of these initiatives has a considerable impact on the use of these practices. Prevailing organizational cultures often inhibit the use of work-family practices, with employees feeling unable to utilize available policies due to organizational values emphasizing the importance of working long hours and being visibly present in the workplace (Beauregard, 2008; Shockley & Allen, 2010). When working from home or a reduced hours load results in being perceived as less committed and less ambitious by managers and colleagues, the career risks of policy utilization can be viewed as too high.

When organizations are seen as providing a supportive environment for the reconciliation of work and family demands, employees are more likely to make use of the family-friendly initiatives offered (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008). The social context plays an important role here, signaling what is considered acceptable practice in an organization (Beauregard, 2011b). For instance, research has found that managers whose colleagues use flexible work arrangements are more likely to make use of these practices themselves (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999; Lambert, Marler, & Gueutal, 2008). Seeing this tangible evidence that work-family initiatives are valued by other organizational members provides reassurance to employees that they will not be disadvantaged if they decide to take up these arrangements themselves. When senior managers in

particular make use of work-family initiatives, they are helping to create an organizational culture in which family commitments are compatible with career advancement or high-level performance (Thompson, 2008).

### **The Impact of National Culture on Organizational Work-Life Perspectives**

Organizational work-family culture is influenced to a considerable extent by national culture. National culture may impact the organization's expectations of how individuals will manage work and family roles, which in turn may affect the organization's demands upon employees' time and energy, the types of policies it offers that are aimed at promoting work-life balance, and the culture of support for employees' work-life balance. At the individual level, national culture may influence an individual's preferences for managing multiple life roles; individuals may be more likely to prioritize roles that are most consistent with their own core values, which are, in part, shaped by their national culture. The concept of national culture builds on the idea that when groups of individuals engage in a shared experience, a shared perception of culture is established (House & Javidan, 2004). Donley, Cannon and Mullen (1998, p. 607) describe how this shared culture is developed at the national level: "national culture as we view it is not a characteristic of individuals or nation states but of a large number of people conditioned by similar background, education, and life experiences." The literature on national culture has identified specific dimensions of culture that differ across national boundaries, such as individualist versus collectivist beliefs; long-term versus short-term orientations; high levels of power inequality versus low levels; masculinity versus femininity; and achievement versus ascription (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). While the impact of national culture has long been ignored in work-family research, recent literature has sought to

better understand how dimensions of national culture influence organizational work-family culture (Powell, Francesco & Ling, 2009).

Powell et al. (2009) identified four dimensions of national culture that influence perceptions of the work-family interface from both conflict and enrichment perspectives: individualism versus collectivism, gender egalitarianism, humane orientation, and specificity versus diffusion. These dimensions influence organizational culture and policies and, in turn, the work-family role demands placed on employees. For example, cross-cultural research on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices demonstrates links between national-level collectivism and organizational provision of employee programs such as maternity leave, career break schemes, flexible benefit plans, housing assistance, and contributions toward children's education (Huo & von Glinow, 1995; Quinn & Rivoli, 1991; Sparrow & Budhwar, 1997). This body of research demonstrates that in collectivistic national cultures, organizational work-family cultures may place greater emphasis upon supporting employees' families directly. In more individualistic national cultures, organizational work-family cultures may be more likely to reflect the values of independent choice and action, and provide support in the form of greater individual control over work schedule flexibility so that employees can combine paid work and family life as they see fit.

These national cultural values may also transmit themselves to individual work-family role preferences. For example, individuals in collectivist cultures tend to identify themselves in relationship to the larger social group (or "collective"), whereas in individualist cultures, the self is more likely to be perceived as a unique and independent entity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). While employees working in collectivist cultures may perceive working long hours to be a necessary sacrifice for the good of the family, employees from individualist cultures may

interpret long hours of work as sacrificing one's family role for the pursuit of individual achievement (Powell et al., 2009). For example, Yang et al. (2012) found that despite working the same number of hours, individuals from individualistic countries perceived higher workloads and the relationship between these workload perceptions and greater job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions was stronger than for their collectivist counterparts. In addition, the more tightly coupled social roles found in collectivist cultures may also influence perceptions of the work-family interface (Hofstede, 1980; Powell et al., 2009). While employees in individualistic cultures may care for and be supported by their individual family unit, employees in more collectivist cultures may work to benefit the larger society and in turn receive support from a larger community in managing work and family needs.

National differences in gender egalitarianism may also influence experiences of the work-family interface (Powell et al., 2009). For example, in societies with pronounced differences in social roles for men and women, women may have greater domestic responsibilities that increase their levels of work-family conflict (Karimi, 2008). In national cultures where gender roles are less differentiated, unpaid work related to caregiving and household maintenance may be more equally shared. Workplace cultures may therefore be more attuned to the need for supporting employees' non-work commitments, because a more equal division of household labor means that both male and female employees will require work-family support. In support of this notion, Lyness and Kropf's (2005) study of 20 European countries found that national gender egalitarianism was positively related to a supportive work-family culture and flexible work arrangements within organizations.

Humane cultures are characterized by investment in the well-being of others, supportive and kind relationships, an interest in belonging or association with the larger group, and low



levels of discrimination (House & Javidan, 2004). Similar to collectivist cultures, these values are likely to foster organizational cultures that are more supportive of employees in general. Employees in humane cultures may experience greater levels of support in managing their home and work roles (Powell et al., 2009), via the provision of family-friendly HRM practices and/or encouragement, understanding, and flexibility offered by sympathetic supervisors.

National cultures also differ according to the level of specificity, in which public and private roles are held separate, versus levels of diffusion, in which public and private roles are more likely to blend together (Powell et al., 2009). For example, China represents a diffuse culture in the sense that personal relationships are an important component to business relationships (Powell et al., 2009). This is reflected in organizational cultures that expect people to spend time socializing with work clients and colleagues outside of the traditional working hours; in a sense, individuals blend work and personal roles. Specificity is similar to Nippert-Eng's (1996) construct of work-life role segmentation and suggests that individuals have strong boundaries between work and family roles. In more diffuse cultures, there is likely to be greater integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996) of work and family roles. These differences across national cultures are likely to influence not only the segmenting or integrating nature of the work environment that organizations offer, but also the preferences of the employees native to those cultures. For example, a more diffuse national culture may manifest itself in an organizational culture that permits or encourages employees to work from home, to bring children in to the office after school or during school holidays, and to attend organization-sponsored events with their families. This environment, which allows for greater integration of work and family roles, may also promote individual preferences for integration. A national culture characterized by greater specificity is more likely to give rise to organizational cultures that expect employees to

keep their work and family lives separate, as well as individuals who prefer work-family segmentation. In these environments, organizational cultures may provide employees with the tools to do so, such as family-related leaves of absence or access to childcare services that enable parents to work full-time hours.

National culture differences are inextricably linked to structural differences across national work systems and societies (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2016). At the national level, culture plays a role in shaping institutional or regulatory frameworks, as the elected officials who initiate and maintain such frameworks and structures do so in a way that reflects the culture in which they operate. These culture-infused national institutional or regulatory frameworks are then likely to influence organizational policy on work-family relationships, as well as how individual workers organize these roles in their lives (Piszczyk & Berg, 2014). For example, Sweden's recent move to a six-hour workday will likely influence both organizational and individual approaches to work and family roles. Organizations may need to restructure work schedules and activities to match the reduced schedules of their workers, and individuals may be able to scale back paid care for dependents and invest more time in the home environment (Matharu, 2015). Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2016, p. 4) describe the combined influence of culture and national structure as setting the premise for "social practices" for the work-family interface, which they define as "the ways in which the coexistence of multiple domains is experienced by individuals and by organizations and the behaviors and decisions that they enact to address this coexistence."

## **The Consequences of Alignment and Misalignment between National and Organizational Cultures**

Above, we have described how national culture and institutions may influence organizational culture such that the two levels of culture are in alignment. This may not always be the case, however. Organizations with a diverse, cross-cultural workforce may face particular challenges in finding ways to align national and organizational cultural considerations. The organizational culture of multinational firms is often strongly shaped by the national culture of their country of origin, the characteristics of which may or may not match those of the national cultures of their global employees. For example, U.S.-based firms operating in Japan may find that their shorter-term, profit-oriented, individualistic operating cultures struggle to motivate Japan-based employees who may possess more collectivist and long-term perspectives on the goals of work. Person-environment fit (P-E fit) occurs when an organization supplies an environment that aligns or is congruent with employee goals and values (Edwards, 1996). P-E fit research focuses primarily on organizational culture and the characteristics of individual employees, but we propose that this theoretical approach can be extended to incorporate the influence of national-level culture on fit or lack thereof. Employees whose expectations and preferences for managing work and family roles have been shaped by a particular national culture may find these expectations challenged when they enter an organization whose work-family culture is influenced by a very different national culture. For instance, an individual from a highly humane national culture may join an organization with the expectation of finding assistance with combining work and family responsibilities. This individual may perceive a lack of fit if the employer has a less humane organizational culture and expects employees to be self-reliant in managing the work-family interface. In contrast, an employee from a national culture

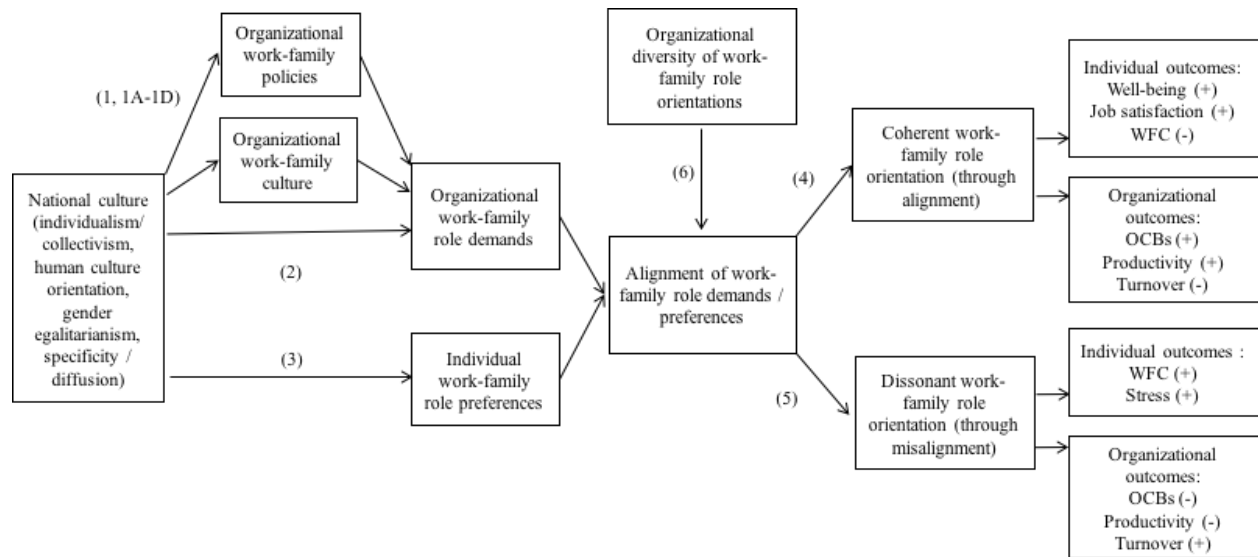
low in gender egalitarianism who enters an organization with an individualistic culture may perceive a good degree of fit, because both cultural environments are characterized by low levels of work-family supports and the expectation that family commitments are outside of the employer's remit.

Person-environment fit across the work-family interface is associated with positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations, including well-being and work satisfaction (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999), increased productivity (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999), reduced turnover intentions (Verquer, Beehr & Wagner, 2003), and greater levels of organization citizenship behavior (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). However, when there is misalignment between an individual's work-family role preferences and the organizational environment, negative consequences may result. From an individual perspective, research has demonstrated that lack of fit may generate work-family conflict and stress (Cable & Judge, 1997; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). From an organizational perspective, lack of fit may result in reduced productivity and increased turnover intentions (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999; Verquer, Beehr & Wagner, 2003). This P-E fit research cited above does not take national culture into account, but we argue that national culture has a substantial role to play in determining the fit between employees' preferences for managing work and family roles, and their organizations' demands for how the work-family interface should be dealt with.

Misalignment between national and organizational culture can also negatively impact the effectiveness of organizational programs designed to help employees meet work and family demands. For example, global pharmaceutical leader Merck and Company, Inc. is familiar with the challenges associated with balancing global organizational culture with the individual national cultures present in their subsidiaries in over 70 countries worldwide (Muse, 2011).

Known in the United States as a leader in offering workplace flexibility and family-supportive benefits, Merck witnessed uneven adoption and implementation of their flexible working initiative abroad (Muse, 2011; Working Mother, 2015). In order to ensure that a revised flexible working policy addressed the needs of employees across cultures, the organization launched a research initiative to identify the needs, values and perspectives of employees from all 77 countries, followed by a process of country-by-country review and implementation in order to ensure alignment with specific cultural and institutional frameworks (Muse, 2011). The results of the program have demonstrated strong cross-national acceptance and satisfaction with levels of workplace flexibility offered, demonstrating the importance of aligning organizational and national expectations (Muse, 2011). Building on the findings reviewed in this chapter, we argue for the importance of alignment between national and organizational work-family culture, and propose future research on this topic based on P-E fit. To guide this research, we develop a new theoretical model of global work-family culture that addresses the contributors to and consequences of alignment and misalignment between national culture and organizational work-family culture. This model is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Model of Global Work-Family Culture**



## Model of Global Work-Family Culture

As reviewed thus far, national culture influences both work-family policies offered by organizations as well as work-family culture within organizations. Therefore, the first set of propositions for this model are as follows:

*Proposition 1: National culture will be associated with the extent to which organizations offer supportive work-family policies and a supportive work-family culture.*

*Proposition 1a: National cultures higher in individualism will be associated with a) fewer organizational work-family policies and b) individual perceptions of a less supportive organizational work-family culture, compared to more collectivistic national cultures.*

*Proposition 1b: National cultures higher in humane orientation will be associated with a) more organizational work-family policies and b) individual perceptions of a more supportive organizational work-family culture, compared to national cultures lower in humane orientation.*

*Proposition 1c: National cultures higher in gender egalitarianism will be associated with a) more organizational work-family policies and b) individual perceptions of a more supportive work-family culture, compared to national cultures that are lower in gender egalitarianism.*

*Proposition 1d: National cultures higher in specificity will be associated with more organizational work-family policies oriented toward segmentation of work and family roles, and national cultures higher in diffusion will be associated with more organizational work-family policies oriented toward integration of work and family roles.*

Further, we argue that national cultures, through their relationship with organizational work-family policies and work-family culture, will be associated with organizational role demands.

*Proposition 2: National culture will influence organizational work-family role demands both directly and indirectly via mediation by organizational work-family policies and work-family culture.*

In addition, we argue that national culture will be associated with individual work-family role preferences. Individuals' beliefs and values are shaped in large part by national culture, and these in turn are likely to influence role enactment. For example, women in less gender egalitarian national cultures may be more likely to prioritize a traditionally feminine role like caregiving over a traditionally male pursuit such as career advancement, either because they believe women should be the primary caregivers for family members, and/or because they believe that they will be socially penalized for doing otherwise.

*Proposition 3: National culture will influence individual work-family role preferences.*

*Proposition 3a: National cultures higher in individualism will be associated with a) less individual demand for organizational work-family policies and b) individual expectations of a less supportive organizational work-family culture, compared to more collectivistic national cultures.*

*Proposition 3b: National cultures higher in humane orientation will be associated with a) greater individual demand for organizational work-family policies and b) greater individual expectation for a supportive work-family culture, compared to national cultures lower in humane orientation.*

*Proposition 3c: National cultures higher in gender egalitarianism will be associated with a) greater individual demand for organizational work-family policies and b) greater individual expectation for a supportive work-family culture, compared to national cultures that are lower in gender egalitarianism.*

*Proposition 3d: National cultures higher in specificity will be associated with stronger individual preferences for the segmentation of work and family roles, and national cultures higher in diffusion will be associated with stronger individual preferences for the integration of work and family roles.*

For the global employee, a key element of the work-family interface is the alignment of one's individual work-family role preferences with organizational work-family role demands. We posit that when alignment exists, individuals experience a *coherent* work-family role orientation: their values and preferences for managing work and family roles, influenced by their national culture, match the expectations of their organization, and their overall approach to the work-family interface is therefore consistent. A coherent work-family role orientation will result in both organizational benefits (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors) and individual benefits (e.g., well-being and satisfaction with work-life balance). However, when individual work-family role preferences do not align with organizational work-family role demands, individuals experience a *dissonant* role orientation: their preferred approach to managing work and family roles does not match what their employer encourages or permits them to do, and their management of the work-life interface is therefore characterized more by conflict and compromise. With a dissonant work-family role orientation, individuals and organizations may be affected by work-family conflict, stress, reduced productivity, and turnover intentions. The following propositions reflect these outcomes of alignment:

*Proposition 4: Alignment between organizational work-family role demands and individual work-family role preferences (a coherent work-family role orientation) will be associated with positive individual (well-being, job satisfaction, low work-family conflict) and organizational (organizational citizenship behaviors, productivity, low turnover intentions) outcomes.*

*Proposition 5: Misalignment between organizational work-family role demands and individual work-family role preferences (a dissonant work-family role orientation) will be*



*associated with negative individual (work-family conflict, stress) and organizational (reduced productivity and turnover intentions) outcomes.*

An important consideration regarding the alignment of individual work-family role preferences and organizational work-family role demands is the diversity of cultural perspectives that are represented in a particular organizational environment. Similar to the challenge faced by Merck in the example cited earlier in this chapter, when there is a high degree of national culture diversity within the work environment, it is more difficult for organizations to develop a work-family culture that aligns with the diversity of employees' work-family role preferences. Although Merck was able to counter these negative effects by adopting a more flexible approach to work-family supports, we argue that in the absence of a concentrated examination of both national and organizational work-family role culture, greater diversity of national cultures within an organization will be associated with less alignment overall between organizational role demands and individual work-family role preferences. As diversity increases, the more difficult it will be for a single contextual environment to meet the individual preferences of any single employee.

*Proposition 6: Greater intra-organizational diversity of individual work-family role preferences will be associated with more dissonant work-family role orientations.*

In sum, this model provides a new framework to enhance understanding of the interplay between national and organizational cultures and the influence of this interplay on individual and organizational outcomes.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

This model seeks to contribute to theory on the work-family interface and person-environment fit by clearly defining the role of national culture in the alignment of organizational work-family culture and individual work-family role preferences. The incorporation of national culture as a confounding influence on values alignment broadens the scope of prior research on

fit relating to the work-family interface (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1997; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). For example, it has been well-established that individuals have preferences for the integration or segmentation of work and family roles and that organizations can offer integrated or segmented experiences, leading to person-environment fit or misfit for the individual worker (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999; Kreiner, 2006). This new model broadens the lens used to examine individual preferences and organizational offerings to better understand the cultural nature of their origins. Rather than attributing preferences to the individual alone or offerings to the whim of the organization, this model centers these positions in the context of national culture. By understanding the influence of national culture, both individuals and organizations may better assess personal preferences and environmental offerings (Hofstede, 1980). In addition, the consideration of culture as driving preferences and offerings may help to reduce potential misattribution when conflict occurs; through misattribution there is a tendency to blame conflict on the individual or organization, rather than on the broader contextual environment (Ross, 1977).

Several implications for practitioners can be derived from this framework. First, organizations need to consider the national cultural backgrounds of their employees as well as the diversity of cultures represented within the organization when considering their work-family policies. A starting point may be to conduct a strong analysis of the type of culture offered by the organization, as well as the preferred culture of current and prospective employees, in order to identify potential misalignment that could be harmful to both the organization and its employees. O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991) developed an Organizational Culture Profile specifically aimed at assessing this cultural fit. Organizations may benefit from implementing assessment tools such as this in order to identify areas for concern.

In addition, as organizations expand globally and open offices in new geographical locations, national culture norms in terms of work and family roles must be taken into consideration when local work practices are established. Global organizations may find that they need to adhere to both emic (universally accepted) as well as etic (context-specific) work policies (Pearson & Entreakin, 2001). For example, a universally accepted policy may be that workers are offered a period of paid leave after having a child; however, a more context-specific policy might require local teams to specify the level of schedule flexibility or work-at-home options offered by the organization. In addition, organizations may find that different employees require different solutions even when co-located, due to their individual preferences and cultural background. Offering choice and giving employees greater control over the management of work and family roles may therefore reduce the likelihood of misalignment (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011).

This chapter has reviewed the influence of national culture on organizational work-family culture, and assessed how the relationship between these two levels of culture impacts employee experiences of the work-family interface. Drawing on the construct of P-E fit, this chapter introduces the idea that national culture needs to be a more frequent consideration in the examination of factors that influence the alignment of organizational and employee needs and preferences with regard to the work-family interface. Particularly in the context of multinational organizations, a more nuanced consideration of the influence of national culture on P-E fit leads to important implications for practitioners with regard to the development of HR policies and practices. Greater understanding and recognition of the impact of national culture on both organizational work-family culture and individual work-family role preferences and demands

will allow organizations to develop more flexible and supportive practices, which can engender more positive individual and organizational outcomes.

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